

**Submission
No 223**

**INQUIRY INTO MANAGEMENT OF PUBLIC LAND IN
NEW SOUTH WALES**

Organisation: Rice Growers Association of Australia

Name: Mr Lloyd Polkinghorne

Date received: 14/08/2012

Submission to

General Purpose Standing Committee No 5 - inquiry into the management of public land in New South Wales, including State Forests and National Park estate.

Introduction

On behalf of the Wakool Branch of the Ricegrowers' Association of Australia, I thank the committee for the opportunity to comment on this important issue.

In our view, the management of public lands in New South Wales has completely failed to take a triple bottom line approach to maintaining the environmental, economic and social values of our region.

The reasons for this are outlined below.

Threats from weeds, pest, diseases and fire

Despite the environmental basis for putting areas of land under public management, the environmental results are often worse than when they were managed privately. We are concerned about the ability and sustainability of public authorities managing the closed forests and newly acquired state parks to level that is required to provide best land use and no third party impacts to surrounding landholders. For example, rural properties such as Yanga station would have been managed by a landholder who cared for their country and performed these duties in good times and bad. With recent funding shortfalls at a state level one does wonder how long and to what standard weeds, pests and diseases will be controlled in these 'protected' areas. Failure in controlling or eradicating these problems could result in great environmental damage on this land.

Fire is also of great concern, with a lack of funding to reduce fuel and do the necessary thinning of red gum forests to reduce fire risk. Devastating fires such as the one that went through Alpine National Park do far more harm to the local environment than if held in private hands.

Economic effects

The effect to our communities from the economic impacts of effectively shutting down the red gum industry in our region cannot be understated. Owning a real estate business in Barham I have seen firsthand the slowdown of industry in the town. The modelled benefit of increased tourism to the area has failed to materialise. The red gum industry was a fantastic, sustainable local industry which provided great employment and value adding opportunities to our region.

As local farmers, our branch members are acutely aware of how well red gums thrive in our region while providing a sustainable timber product and heat source. With rising energy prices, the removal of this heating option represents another cost to local residents caused by the closure of these forests. Our area does not have access to natural gas so we have been reliant on wood heaters, bottled gas or electric heaters. Red gum provided a critical function in the day to day heating needs of most family homes.

Our shire will also feel the economic reality of losing the rate income from stations converted to state parks. All remaining ratepayers in our area have been financially disadvantaged by the reduced

rate base available to local government. Given the benefits that public land managers receive from local government investment in the provision of roads and other local services available to park visitors, it is not unreasonable that they too should be asked to bear some of those costs.

Social effects

It would be remiss of me to neglect to social impact these changes have on our communities. The tighter restrictions on activities that are allowed on publicly managed land have caused local people to become disconnected from these forested areas, which were previously a great community resource for family camping and fishing activities. People are now much less likely to spend their leisure time in these places and their connection to them has been greatly affected.

We are a resilient community that loves and cares for our natural resources in times of drought, fire or flood. The community has been through a lot of challenges and it is disappointing to see government policy that threatens the ability of communities to adapt, change and be sustainable into the future.

Conclusion

There is a great responsibility to looking after the natural resources and local industries for future generations to come, but meaningful community consultation is sadly missing in government engagement in our region. Our communities live here, work here and love our land. We have a lot to offer that is not currently being utilised when governments make decisions over land use in our area, and it is our hope that this parliamentary committee can start to rectify the situation.

Lloyd Polkinghorne
President, Wakool Branch
Ricegrowers' Association of Australia